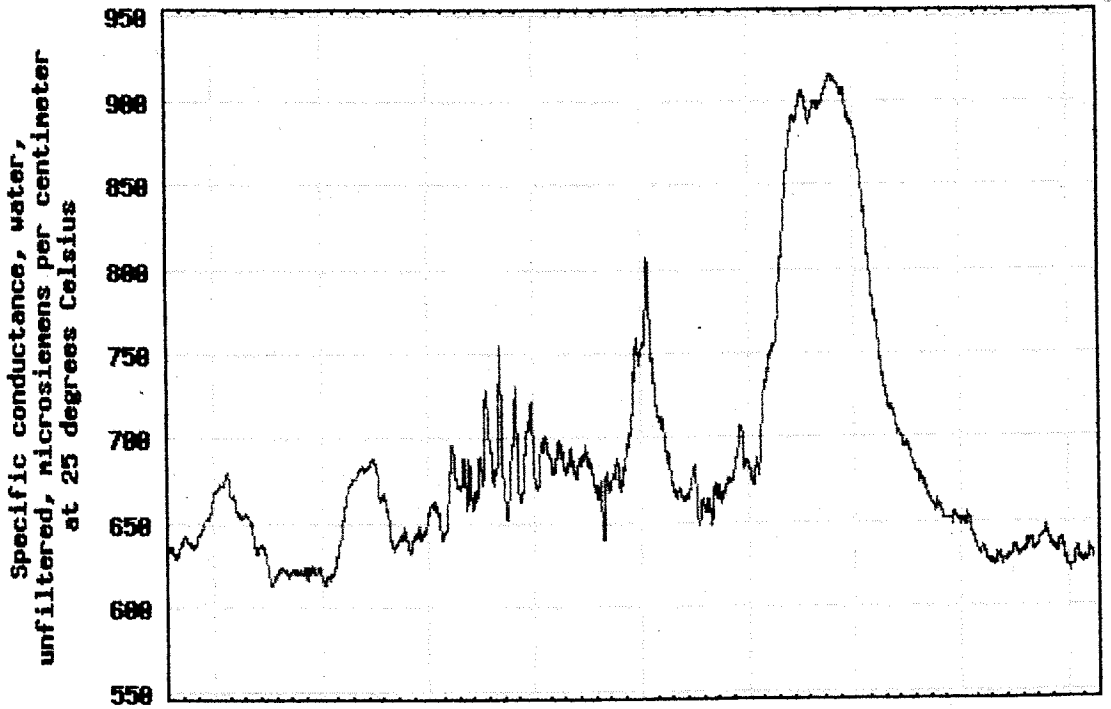




# USGS 06306300 Tongue River at State Line nr Decker MT

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----- Provisional Data Subject to Revision ----- 08-09

Mr. Chairman and members of the Long-range Planning Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak. My name is Beth Kaeding and I live in Bozeman. I am the Chair of Northern Plains Resource Council, and I am here today on behalf of our members in southeastern Montana who farm, ranch, and irrigate in the Tongue and Powder river basins.

Northern Plains and its members have been quite concerned about the water quality in this region since coal bed methane development began and we have actively worked to protect Montana's agricultural economy from any deleterious effects of that energy development—we are not opposed to CBM development, we simply want to see it done right.

We went before Montana's Board of Environmental Review in 2003 with a proposal for setting numeric water quality standards for the EC and SAR of CBM wastewater. And, again in 2006 we petitioned the BER to implement the non-degradation clause of the Water Quality Act for those numeric standards.

We did this because water quality is vitally important to irrigators because water that is too saline will not only harm aquatic ecosystems and vegetation/crops, but will eventually sterilize the soil. **Water quality data is not valid without water quantity data.** Consequently, we completely support the funding request as presented in HB 7. By funding the gauging stations, fundamental data that needs to be collected continuously though time will be available and can be used to monitor water quality and correct any problems quickly.

Irrigators use this data on a real time basis so that they know the quality of the water before they put it on their fields. Last year, Mark Fix, a member who ranches on the Tongue River south of Miles City, used the real-time gauge station data to watch a large amount of high EC water move down the Tongue River from Stateline to Miles City. Needless to say he did not irrigate until the EC levels dropped. I have here a graph that shows a spike of EC levels between November 8 of last year and January<sup>3</sup>. These two examples speak volumes for the absolute necessity of ensuring the gauge stations are funded and operating.

As you may know, part of the BLM's method for approving coal bed methane well permits includes a water screen. The only way for these water screens to be effective is to continue the funding for the USGS stations and ensure the flow data is available.

The discharge permits issued by the Department of Environmental Quality for coal bed methane wastewater require not only instantaneous readings but also 30-day averages as well. The only way to obtain the 30-day averages is through the continuous gauge stations installed by the USGS.

Finally, Montana is embroiled in a lawsuit with Wyoming concerning the Yellowstone Compact. It is critical for Montana to keep track of the flow data to preserve our rights to water coming from Wyoming.

Northern Plains and its members have worked diligently through the years to secure funding from both the federal government and the state to ensure the gauging stations are installed and maintained. Please vote to approve HB 7. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

*Beth Kaeding, Chair, Northern Plains Resource Council*  
1/21/09